



## BASIC FIRE SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR OUTDOOR BURNING

**Careless debris burning is a primary cause of wildfires every year in Tennessee.**

Wildfires result in millions of dollars of damaged or lost resources, property and lives. Most people never intend to start a wildfire, but even the best of intentions can produce disastrous results when safety precautions aren't taken.

**Safe disposal of household trash, leaves, brush piles, and construction debris can eliminate a major wildfire threat.** If you must burn debris, do it safely. This pamphlet provides some of the basic guidelines for outdoor burning.

## CONSIDER ALTERNATIVES TO BURNING

**Some types of debris, such as leaves, grass and stubble may be of more value if they are not burned.** Composting can yield valuable organic matter that can be used to enrich the soil, while helping extend the useful life of landfills. Household trash such as glass and metal that can't be composted can be hauled away to a recycling center or landfill.

For current weather information and burning conditions, contact the Division of Forestry. Permits and burning advisories can be obtained at no cost by calling this number during regular working hours Monday through Friday (with the exception of State holidays). Your call will help us protect your property, and will reduce false alarms.



*For more information about safe debris burning, contact the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry, P.O. Box 40627, Nashville, TN 37204; 615-837-5537; 615-837-5129 or visit our website at: <http://www.state.tn.us/agriculture/forestry>*



# SAFE DEBRIS BURNING

Tennessee Department of Agriculture  
Division of Forestry

## 1. OBTAIN A BURNING PERMIT

State laws require a permit for open-air burning from October 15 through May 15. Permits are free. Simply call the local Division of Forestry office phone number for burning permits in your county. You will be issued a permit number over the phone. Permits are issued based on weather conditions and/or fire occurrence. You will also receive useful weather information and burning advice.



By calling for a permit, you are helping your local firefighters. If they know your fire's location, and that your fire is under control, they will not waste time and money driving out to answer a false alarm.

**NOTE:** This permit does not exempt the burner from local air pollution regulations. Check with local authorities about air pollution regulations.

## 2. NOTIFY YOUR NEIGHBORS

As both an act of courtesy and to comply with state laws, let adjacent landowners know of your plans to burn.



## 3. KEEP WATER AND EQUIPMENT HANDY

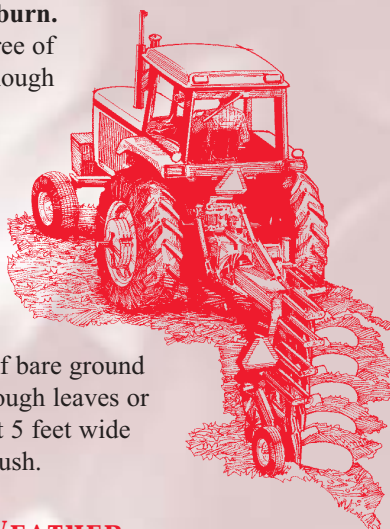
Have an available supply of water and hand tools such as rakes and shovels nearby in case your fire should get away. Mechanized equipment may be necessary to contain fires when weather and fuel conditions make control difficult.



## 4. ESTABLISH FIREBREAKS

Rake or plow a firebreak around the area you want to burn.

Firebreaks should be free of vegetation and wide enough to contain flames and burning embers that may fall or roll from the pile. The higher the vegetation and larger the pile to be burned, the wider the firebreak should be. It should expose a strip of bare ground at least 3 feet wide through leaves or short grass, and at least 5 feet wide through tall grass or brush.



## 5. WATCH THE WEATHER

Stay informed about possible weather changes. Wind and relative humidity are important weather considerations. Approaching fronts and thunderstorms may change wind directions and generate strong gusts. Outdoor burning should be postponed when winds are high, relative humidities low, and wind gusts are predicted.

Generally, burning permits are not issued for dry, windy days. Even if you have a permit, you should stop burning if a strong wind comes up. Winds may not only carry burning embers into surrounding vegetation but also fan the flames making the fire difficult to control.



Morning and late afternoon are usually good times to burn (when winds are calm and the relative humidity is higher). As smoke usually begins to settle after sundown, be sure to complete burning before it can become a health or road hazard.

## 6. CONTROL THE FIRE

Your fire is your responsibility! Stay with your fire at all times! You may be liable for any damages your fire causes to other people's property!

Be sure you have enough help. Don't try to burn more than you can handle by yourself. Keep debris piles small, gradually adding to the fires as they burn down. Large piles of burning debris generate intense heat capable of carrying relatively heavy embers up and across control lines away from the fire.

Select burn locations away from overhanging branches and utility lines. Intense heat rising from a fire could ignite leaves and branches of trees or damage overhead lines and disrupt essential utility services.

Should your fire escape, do not hesitate to call 911.

